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ABSTRACT

The nature of the researcher-participant relationship in narrative inquiry is explored by reflecting on the researcher's own experience in such a relationship. It is argued that the researcher who wants to make a difference in the lives of participants must be open to change in return. Personal involvement with participants is an essential ingredient in narrative inquiry, but it must not be confused with a mission to save the participants. Learning must be reciprocal, and dialogue that has a significant impact on the participant must transform the researcher as well. The project on which the exploration is based is a narrative inquiry into the cultural identities of four Japanese students and their readjustment in returning to Japan after prolonged study overseas. Participants benefited from being listened to and from being forced to reflect on their own experiences. Participants felt that the research made them focus on their experiences as returnees, and that the self-knowledge they gained was a valuable result of participation. The researcher experienced a similar gain in knowledge and the benefits of self-examination. (Contains 19 references.) (SLD)

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Researcher-Participant Relationship in Narrative Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I discuss the nature of the researcher-participant relationship in narrative inquiry by reflecting on my trial and error in engaging in such a relationship. The discussion of collaborative relationship in narrative and other qualitative research tends to focus on the benefits of such research for the participants. The collaborative mode of research, the argument goes, gives voice to those who have traditionally been silenced and helps them to grow. I argue in this paper that if the researcher wants to make a difference to the participants, she or he must be prepared to be changed in return. Learning must be reciprocal; dialogue that is authentic enough to have a significant impact on the participant cannot help transforming the researcher as well.

Researcher-Participant Relationship in Narrative Inquiry

What first drew my attention to the relationship between the researcher and the researched was my experience of being a research subject. Having lived in three different countries, bilingual and bicultural, I make a fine research subject for many intercultural studies. One study stands out in my mind in particular. The researcher was investigating the cross-cultural adaptation of international students in Toronto. Several months earlier he had sent me a questionnaire, which I filled out and sent back. Then he phoned me one day and asked to meet me for an interview. A few days later we met. We went through the same questionnaire again to determine if there had been any improvement in my psychological well-being during the intervening months. Any digression on my part from the main thrust of his questions was discouraged by a disapproving look or by a verbal interruption. I apparently did rather well in the interview: What I said supported the model the researcher was testing. At the end of an hour he leaned over and said to me with a smile on his face, "See? It really fits the pattern."

After that I saw him occasionally on the street; he did not recognize my face.

As this story illustrates, in my role as a research subject I did not feel that I was heard. In my own research, therefore, the least I wanted to achieve was that my participants feel listened to. One reason I chose narrative inquiry as my approach was that it encourages story-telling and story-listening between researcher and participant. Furthermore I hoped that my participants would find the research process useful in some way. What I had in mind was Dewey's (1938/1963) notion of *educative experience*, an experience that fosters

growth, thereby preparing the person positively for future experiences. It was my wish that my participants would find our collaboration to be such an experience.

As I worked with real participants, however, my commitment to and view of collaborative, educative research was challenged a number of times. Three years later, having completed a narrative project, I stand on considerably different grounds from where I started. Based on this experience, I make the following argument in this paper: It is possible to create a research process that is educative to the participants, but in order for that to happen, the researcher must be prepared to change as well.

The first two sections are a theoretical discussion of the researcher-participant relationship in narrative inquiry. I suggest that personal involvement with participants is an essential ingredient in narrative inquiry, but that it should not be confused with a mission to "save" the participants. The next two sections concern the praxis, i.e., what I as researcher and my participants learned from having being involved in a research relationship. Finally, I explore the possibility and merits of disclosing the real identities of the research participants.

PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT WITH PARTICIPANTS

While many qualitative researchers nowadays scorn the impersonal and controlling way in which the traditional mode of research has treated subjects (Gitlin, 1990; Mishler, 1986), some still shy away from active involvement with participants for fear of jeopardizing the research itself. They seem torn between their desire to respect participants' voices and their socialization in the positivistic paradigm that calls for objectivity (Zajano &

Edelsberg, 1993). Seidman (1991), while promoting the qualitative mode of research, shows reluctance to give up that last bit of distance:

> The rapport an interviewer must build in an interviewing relationship needs to be controlled. Too much or too little rapport can lead to distortion of what the participant reconstructs in the interview. . . . As in teaching, the interviewing relationship can be friendly but not a friendship. (p. 74)

Woods (1986) gives a similar warning when he says that without a measure of detachment "one runs the risk of 'going native'; that is, identifying so strongly with members that defending their values comes to take precedence over actually studying them " (p. 34).

I object to these views on two accounts. First, many narrative researchers are already "native" when they start their inquiry. We choose a topic that is close to our heart, which means that more often than not, we belong to the same group of people as our participants: e.g., a former female principal studying the experiences of other female principals; a Chinese immigrant woman working with another Chinese immigrant woman; a Japanese-English bilingual approaching other Japanese-English bilinguals, etc. Of course as Merton (1972) notes in his *Insiders and Outsiders* article, we are not completely identical with our participants; with any two persons one can find something common, something different. But it is the sense of shared experience, not the differences, that draws a narrative researcher to a particular group. Personal involvement is already present from the beginning.

Second, I find the claim that researchers must control their rapport with their participants rather arrogant. It presumes that the nature of that relationship is for the researcher to determine. This position completely

ignores the fact that it takes two to build a relationship; that the participants too have a say in what kind of relationship to develop. If researchers adjust their stance according to their idea of a desirable relationship, so too do participants.

I related to my participants in the spirit articulated by Oakley (1981): "Personal involvement is more than dangerous bias--it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives" (p. 58). Schutz (1932/1967) more than a half century ago, called a genuine relationship in which two persons enter into each other's lives and value each other as a unique irreplaceable individual the *We-relationship*. He distinguished it from the *They-relationship*, in which one's knowledge of another is more superficial and cast into types. Schutz maintains that only to the extent the *We-relationship* is present between two persons, they "can live in each other's subjective contexts of meaning" (p. 166). In other words, my knowledge of a participant depends on the kind and quality of the relationship between us.

Some might criticize me for "biasing" my participants' responses by being personally involved. In reply I would argue that I do not know any interviewers who do not influence respondents in one way or another. A neutral interviewer capable of obtaining objective data is a fiction. Detachment is a stance just as personal involvement is, and both affect what respondents say. Participants can sense if researchers are genuinely interested in their stories. They adjust the extent of disclosure accordingly. Stories cannot be told when they are not heard. That is why story-telling is a collaborative endeavour between teller and listener. The commitment on the part of the researcher creates a safe place where the participant's stories can unfold fully.

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RESEARCHER AS GRAND EMANCIPATOR

On the other hand, I have never been comfortable with the notion of the researcher as "grand emancipator." Some researchers, removing themselves from the research practice that exploits and silences participants, have gone to the other extreme and advocate "the empowerment of the researched." Critical theorists typically take on this role. Anderson (1989) lists "freeing individuals from sources of domination and repression" (p. 254) as one of the ultimate goals of critical ethnography. It is one thing to respect your participants' knowledge and experience; it is quite another to claim that you can "empower" and "give voice" to your participants--as if voice belonged to you in the first place and you were kindly giving it to them. These metaphors reinforce the hierarchical relations between researcher and participant; their implication is that the participant needs fixing in some way and the researcher is capable of performing the task.

Consider the following statement by Fay (1977):

> Changing people's basic understanding of themselves and their world is a first step in their radically altering the *self-destructive patterns of interaction* that characterize their social relations. (cited in Gitlin, Siegel, & Boru, 1989, p. 248, emphasis added)

But who are we to judge that our participants' way is self-destructive and ours is self-restorative? Such a statement patently reveals the arrogant assumption that they, the participants, are caught up in their situation to see clearly, while we, the researchers, have a God's-eye view.

We ought to remind ourselves that, in the majority of cases, the participants do not come to us for help; *we* go to them to ask them to help us understand a phenomenon better. If they stopped participating, our research would be no more, whereas their lives would go on without us. I believe that

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the more respectful collaboration lies in the efforts to negotiate ways in which the research provides an opportunity for both parties, researcher and participant, to learn. As Clarke (1990) writes, "Empowerment implies an awakening to the possibilities and this cannot come as a gift from someone else" (p. 391).

In the next two sections I will discuss what I as researcher and my participants learned from our collaboration. I believe that our project made a difference to my participants; they gained the kind of self-knowledge they would not have otherwise achieved. But I too learned many things about myself--not only as a researcher but as a person.

THE RESEARCHER'S EXPERIENCE

The project on which the following account is based is a narrative inquiry into the cultural identities of Japanese students who return to Japan after a prolonged overseas sojourn (they are called Japanese returnees). It was a project for my doctoral dissertation (Kanno, 1996). It is well known that many returnees experience severe readjustment problems when they go back to Japan. I was one such returnee; I wanted to know how other returnees dealt with dual cultural allegiance and what their readjustment was like.

I worked with Sawako, Kenji, Kikuko, and Rui, all of whom were my former students at a Saturday Japanese school in Toronto. Our collaboration started when they were completing high school in Toronto and continued well into the third year after their return to Japan. The participants not only contributed stories to the project but played a major role in the analysis of the data. We discussed tentative interpretations throughout our collaboration. When I finished compiling their narrative chapters (each participant had a chapter in the thesis dedicated to her or him), my participants responded with

suggestions for revisions in writing. Their feedback was incorporated into the final version of the thesis.[1]

Non-hierarchical Relationship

When this project began, I knew that I did not wish to have a hierarchical research relationship with my participants. I soon discovered, however, that it was easier said than done. First of all, my participants were my former students, whom I taught in the hierarchical and formal atmosphere of a Japanese school. In my teaching I tried my best not to come across as an authoritarian figure; being close to their age helped. My students, for their part, were more casual with teachers than Japanese students in Japan because they were used to the Canadian school climate. But the fact remained that I was seen as the transmitter of knowledge, which I feared would carry over to my research and would interfere with my effort to create a non-hierarchical relationship with the participants.

The interference came from both sides: from my participants and from myself. In Japanese schools students address teachers by combining their last name with the title *Sensei* (teacher). Thus I was called Kanno Sensei in school. Even after the four students graduated from the Japanese school and joined this project, I still remained Kanno Sensei to them. My new identity as researcher, rather than replacing the old one of teacher, was simply added to it. I told myself that it would be probably unreasonable to expect them to call me otherwise since *I* could not bring myself to address my former teachers--from elementary school to university--by anything other than Sensei myself.

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[1] We conversed mostly in Japanese. All the quotes throughout this paper are my translation unless otherwise noted.

What I did *not* appreciate was that the participants seemed to slot themselves and me in different categories. One activity we were all engaged in was a group journal: Each of us wrote an entry describing the latest news in her or his life and sent the journal to the next person by mail. I had hoped that this journal would promote a non-hierarchical exchange of ideas and stories among the five of us. But in one entry Kikuko wrote, "What strikes me as I read *Sensei's and the others'* entries is that . . ." (italics added). It clearly revealed her underlying frame of thinking in which the other participants and I belonged to different categories. I did not want to be placed on the pedestal; I wanted to be included as one of them. Obviously that was not going to happen overnight.

But I too held onto the pedestal without being aware of it, and it showed in my choice of language. The Japanese language is extremely rich in devices that mark the relative social standing between two interlocutors. Depending on the hierarchical distance and the degree of formality of the context, a simple question "Are you going to Tokyo tomorrow?" can take roughly three different verb-endings, each one progressively more polite and formal than the one before (Table 1):

Table 1. Three different ways of saying 'Are you going to Tokyo tomorrow?"

		tomorrow	Tokyo	to	go
(1)	plain form	*Ashita*	*Tokyo*	*e*	*iku (no)?*
(2)	desu/masu form	*Ashita*	*Tokyo*	*e*	*ikimasuka?*
(3)	honorific form	*Ashita*	*Tokyo*	*e*	*irasshaimasuka?*

I thought I was careful to treat my participants courteously, but the transcripts of earlier interviews revealed that I often employed the plain form (1) while

my participants usually spoke in the more polite masu/desu form (2). This undeniably reinforced sense of hierarchy between us.

While I modified my language consciously, it was ultimately my increasing appreciation of their knowledge that altered my attitude towards my participants, including my language. At the beginning, some part of me thought of them as "teenagers" with all the negative connotations included: "shallow," "egocentric," and "conformist." However as I started to interview them, I could not help noticing their insights. I have strong opinions about the returnee issues based on my own experience. When my participants brought different but equally strong opinions, we clashed hard. But they had their stories to tell, and I could see how, given those stories, they came to hold their views. Which in turn led me to examine how I came to hold mine. Perhaps I had only seen them two-dimensionally, their recent selves, initially; as I heard their stories I began to see them more three-dimensionally, as persons with history. As a result I started to use quite spontaneously more courteous language, usually the desu/masu form but sometimes mixing some honorific expressions. Meanwhile, my participants became used to interviews and also probably sensed my desire to create an equal relationship with them. They started to relax their language with me. In still predominantly desu/masu register, some plain form expressions started to appear, especially when they were absorbed in their story-telling. By the end of the project the initial discrepancy between our language had narrowed down considerably, although on the whole they still tended to use more desu/masu forms and honorific expressions with me than I did with them.

Capacity for Caring

In discussing the nature of the researcher-participant relationship, Seidman (1991) argues that "interviewers must avoid changing the interview relationship into a therapeutic one" (p. 81). I agree with him that it is not the researcher's role to treat the participant. And yet, sometimes we find ourselves cast into a role akin to that of a therapist (Sparkes, 1994). When that happens, it tests our capacity for caring. One such moment came when I met Sawako for the first time after she returned to Japan. It was the time when her depression was at its peak because of the readjustment difficulties and alienation from her peers she was experiencing. Recounting those difficulties, she looked as if she was going to burst into tears at any moment.

At the beginning of this project I had pledged to myself that I would be there for my participants should they need me. My participants were about to enter a critical period of their cross-cultural cycle: readjustment to the home country. As an ex-returnee I knew the potential stress and loneliness involved. Of course the fact I had experienced difficult readjustment did not mean that my participants would too. It was possible that they would fit in smoothly. But should they encounter a problem, I wanted to be a person they could turn to, without fear of being judged. I felt that if anyone understood how they felt it was I.

So I thought I was ready to share other returnees' pain. But I sat there across from my fellow returnee who was on the verge of tears in a crowded café, paralyzed. Instead of trying to share Sawako's distress which I personally knew so well, all I could think of was, "Oh dear, if she starts to cry, people around us will surely think that I'm making her cry." I was even somewhat annoyed with her for implicating me in an embarrassing scene like this. I did not know what to do and so I did nothing. According to Seidman, I behaved

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the best way I could under the circumstances: "My experience is that many times the best thing to do is nothing. Let the participant work out the distress without interfering and taking inappropriate responsibility for it" (p. 82). But that memory stays with me as the day I learned my own limits of caring. Just because you have experienced a problem in your life, it does not mean that you are prepared to share the distress of someone going through the same problem. In fact it sometimes works the opposite way: Because you know the pain involved, your natural reaction is to pull away when you see someone running into the same problem. You are too scared to be involved. When I think of it now, a hand on her shoulder or a simple reassurance "I know what you mean" might have sufficed to comfort Sawako. But I was too preoccupied with my own distress then to extend my hand to her.

Inspired by the Participants' Stories

The above two points pertain mainly to my role as researcher. But sometimes what my participants told me led me to look at myself in my private life as well. As I said, my participants and I had much in common: We all had the experience of having spent our formative years in a foreign country; we were all international students in Toronto when this project began. Yet within this common framework each of us was living a different story. Tracing my participants' life stories led me to reexamine my own life; it was easier to see the contour of my own intercultural experience against the backdrop of other examples.

For instance, Kenji and I once discussed discrimination. Kenji was an extremely popular figure in his high school despite the disadvantage of having to operate in a second language and of being a member of visible minority. I wondered if he was one of the few lucky ones who somehow

escaped racism all together. But to my question, "Have you encountered racism here in Canada?" Kenji answered, "Of course I have!"--in a tone of voice that indicated that the answer should be blindingly obvious. He went on to explain that a "ultra-minority" like him had no choice but to learn to overcome cultural and racial barriers if he wanted to make friends at all.

He still believed, however, that understanding was ultimately possible. "The important things is to let them know who you are. I think now they understand. I'm not mean, I don't depend on others, so now they talk to me very casually." He said he could not fathom why so many people were not interested in communicating outside of their own ethnic/cultural groups, when in fact it was so enjoyable: "There's no country like this, you know? It's a place where people from all over the world who have experienced so many things and know so much gather."

At that time I was growing increasingly weary of subtle racial discrimination I had been encountering in Toronto. Having grown up as part of the majority in Japan, I sat very uncomfortably in the chair labeled "visible minority." Small incidents, each of which in isolation would not have caught my attention, together sent me a disconcerting message that I did not belong: Why doesn't the supermarket cashier say "Thank you" to me when he says it to every white customer?; why does the secretary smile all of a sudden when I am accompanied by my English-Canadian husband?; am I simply imagining things?; is it all in my head? I grew cynical: If they don't like me, why should I like them? Kenji's words hit very close to home. They did not exactly make the world seem all rosy or the entire human species warm and loving, but in comparison with Kenji's unabashed optimism I at least came to realize my own cynical state.

There were numerous occasions like this where I would go to interview to my participants while feeling low in my own life and would come out of the meeting with a sense of renewal. Perhaps seeing my participants in a similar cross-cultural predicament and learning how differently each of them tackled the situation helped me to "look at things as if they could be otherwise" (Greene, 1995, p. 166) in my own life.

In summary, despite my intention to develop a collaborative relationship with my participants, in practice I found myself not always capable of living up to my ideal. I was not as prepared as I had thought to let go of the control of the research. I was not always capable of sharing the emotional baggage of my participants either. In fact there were many situations where my participants indirectly helped me to resolve some of my personal problems. I came out of the project considerably humbled.

THE PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCE

I learned tremendously from this project. But what about my participants? Did they gain anything? If so, what? More generally, it always amazes me that people are willing to take part in a study. What motivates people to commit themselves? Researchers commit themselves because the topic interests them, because they want a degree, job, promotion, tenure, and so on. Once the research is over, they are usually the ones who receive the credit. In comparison, the benefits participants receive are less tangible, harder to define. And yet people regularly agree to participate in a study and sometimes show the kind of enthusiasm, commitment, and affection that surprises even the researcher. Rui started keeping a journal for this project and for the next two years produced and fully shared with me over 100 pages.

Sawako, when asked to give feedback on a 30-page chapter of her life story, wrote 14 pages of comments. Why did they do that?

Considerations for participant benefits are crucial if we want the research process to be an educative experience not only for us, the researchers, but for our participants as well. The knowledge we gain from our work, Allender (1986) writes, "necessarily furthers a relevant inquiry that in essence is [the researcher's] personal self-growth. And yet, another important goal for research is to *add to the understanding of human experience in ways useful for others*" (p. 186, emphasis added). What kind of benefit did my participants gain from participating in this project? And how could the study have been designed differently so that they could have learned more?

First of all, being listened to is extremely affirming: "How many times in life do you have the opportunity to talk at great length about how you think the world works to a person who is genuinely fascinated by what you're saying?" (Agar, 1994, p. 184). Before I started interviewing, I was ready to share my stories with my participants. I did not want to give them the impression that I was only interested in snatching away their stories and not prepared to offer mine in return (Oakley, 1981). Besides I too had the need to tell stories, as Connelly and Clandinin (1990) note:

> We [the researchers] found that merely listening, recording, and fostering participant story telling was both impossible. . . and unsatisfying. We learned that we, too, needed to tell our stories. Scribes we were not; story tellers and story livers we were. And in our story telling, the stories of our participants merged with our own to create new stories, ones that we have labeled *collaborative stories*. (p. 12, original emphasis)

As it turned out, however, my participants were so interested in telling their stories that when I started to relate my experiences in relation to what they said, they looked impatient and eager to reconvene theirs. In the end I decided to focus on listening to their stories during interviews, responding to them with interpretations or my stories in writing, such as interview notes and the group journal.

They became more eager to listen to my stories towards the end of the project, especially after their chapters had been written. They knew that the data collection was over and that the pressure to supply me with yet more information was off. They had confirmed that I got their stories more or less right by reading my writings. So now they wanted to know my stories. It was delight for me to finally receive the reciprocity. No longer were they the information generator and I the note-taker, but we could both relate and comment on stories. I felt that they finally treated me as an equal, rather than Sensei, the more experienced.

Because being listened to is so affirming, in this kind of research the boundary between what is and what is not for research sometimes blurs. In an early stage of data collection, Sawako called to say that she had found a new boyfriend. She was very excited and wanted to share her happiness with me. But the next time we met for an interview she would not discuss it with me, because she considered it outside the scope of our research although I thought it very relevant (she later started to talk about it on record). According to her logic I was her *friend* when she phoned but I was her *researcher* when we had an interview, different roles to which she adjusted her stance on disclosure. As well, Kikuko sent a troop of her friends from Japan to me when they were visiting Toronto--without her, that is--presumably because she thought it

would be "neat" for her friends from university and me to meet. I enjoyed our meeting but I must confess I came out feeling, "What was that all about?"

The awareness that ours was a *working* relationship based on a project was much stronger with the male participants. That is not to say that they were less open with me that the female participants; rather they seemed to set definitive parameters within which this study fell. Within the research domain they were far more open than I could ever hope for; outside of the domain they remained resolutely closed. For instance, Rui did not have any reservation about sharing his journal, which he started at my suggestion, but he would not discuss certain topics he considered irrelevant, such as girlfriends.

Second, telling or writing stories forces you to reflect on your experiences and bring your awareness to another level of depth. Often our knowledge remains tacit unless an opportunity strikes to give it a form. Widdershoven (1993) points out the importance of articulation: "We only become aware of the significance of [the] experiences by telling stories about them and fusing them with other stories. In this process the pre-narrative structure of experience is articulated and changed into a narrative pattern" (p. 7). I have been interviewed on a number of occasions, and even in the kind of interview where the interviewer follows a prescribed protocol, the act of articulating my thoughts brings out ideas that I did not know existed in me; what comes out of my mouth surprises me.

Of course, there is pain involved. Sawako touched on this point after writing a long exposé of her own weaknesses as part of her feedback on my writing: "It is painful to analyse my feelings in a honest, detailed manner in writing like I am doing now. People usually try to erase scars from the past, don't they? But I feel proud of myself for facing the fact. . . . I used to be the

kind of person who feels relieved by looking at others who are lower than herself." I have mentioned that this project forced me to reexamine myself, including the parts I do not like--my cowardice, vanity, and arrogance. The same thing happened to my participants, probably more frequently because they were the main story-tellers in the project.

The consensus among the participants was that participating in this project made them think about returnee issues and increased their awareness as a returnee. Rui offered the following thought mid-way through the project: "[This project] gave me an incentive to start a journal and I think I have developed an ability to organize my thoughts in writing a little. I also think that I have more interest in and a better awareness of 'returnees' and issues related to them than other people . . . . In other words, the fact that I am participating in this project itself increased my awareness as a returnee. . . . In this kind of long-term study, we are forced to reflect on ourselves deeply. As each of us is thinking, 'What really is a returnee?' we participate more directly in the study. I think it is a very humane approach."

Third, increased self-knowledge through telling stories is further enhanced by reading the reports written by the researcher. All of my participants made some remark about how interesting it was to find out how they appeared to another person. Reading a written account, the participants can objectify their own identity. Kikuko said, "It's extremely interesting to be analysed by someone else: 'Oh, is this how other people perceive me?' . . . . Especially because there's no one else around me who can analyse me in such a systematic manner. . . . I didn't know I was such a straightforward person!" Rui commented that he knew that it was his story and yet felt as if it was about someone else. In the course of reading, he said, he identified with the

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main character (which was really he) so much that he felt like saying, "Go on! Go on!" "It's a weird feeling, I tell you," he laughed.

Typically, by the time the participants read their final narratives three years had passed since the first interview, and they commented on the self-growth that took place in that time. Rui said, "I'm embarrassed about some of the comments I made. . . . I guess the best way to put it is 'I was still young then!' Of course there are many aspects of myself two years ago that I can learn from today. In some ways I was more rebellious and determined, and those characteristics I had two years ago are things I can learn from even though they probably will be expressed differently now" (his English). Similarly, Kenji wrote, "It's rather embarrassing to have what you said bounce back to you through a different medium [i.e., a written text]. Particularly when there's a two year gap between the time of the interviews and the final account like in this case, I can't help laughing at my own immature and arrogant comments. But that's interesting in its own way and is a good memory now."

Lastly, this kind of research leaves a record of one's experiences in a tangible form. I was not aware of this at the onset, and was pleasantly surprised when Sawako pointed it out to me: "Reading through [the chapter] you sent me from the past to the present, I could see that I became more honest with my feelings and matured bit by bit. This kind of record is not something I could have produced myself because I kept a diary diligently only until I got into university. I got to know myself." The emotions, courage, determination, weakness, smell, tears, and smiles that are associated with an experience are ephemeral; they may be forgotten in time. But if they are captured in a richly textured story, one can always go back to it and experience them all over again. The written stories become a relic of the past, a proof that

one has been there, much like diaries and photographs. This aspect of research may be particularly meaningful for people who are going through a period of rapid self-transformation, such as adolescents/young adults, first-year teachers, and new immigrants.

On the other hand, there was much to be desired in this project from the participants' point of view. Kenji said, "Next time, I would like to have an interview that would bring out the internal aspects of myself that even I don't know exist," suggesting my inadequate interview skills. Kikuko told me that there were not enough opportunities for the project members to interact with one another: "It was pity that I didn't get to talk to Rui and Kenji at all." This is a good point. I had thought that the group journal would provide a plenty of opportunity for communication between the five of us. However, with the journal taking months to make a round, it generated little sense of real-time interaction. There was of course much dialogue between each of the participants and myself and a considerable amount of communication between Rui and Kenji in the Tokyo area and Sawako and Kikuko in Kansai. But virtually no interaction existed between the two regions, except for the journal. As Kikuko suggested, all of us would have benefited from face-to-face discussion if we had met as a group once before the departure from Canada, once after everyone's reentry into Japan, and once again two years later.

THE DECISION TO REVEAL THE PARTICIPANTS' IDENTITIES

In this study the real names of the four participants were used (pseudonyms are used for other individuals and their affiliations). The decision was made between each of my participants and myself. From the beginning there was a strong request from Sawako that her real name be used

in the final report. "Do use my real name, Sensei," she said, "because I'm proud of my experience." The others also seemed interested in doing the same. But the decision was deferred until they had read drafts of their narrative chapters. I wanted them to make that decision knowing how they were portrayed in the final report. I also wanted to ensure to myself that contents of what I wrote would not harm them if their identities were disclosed.

So until the very last stage of this project, pseudonyms were used consistently. In the meantime I had discussed with them repeatedly the potential misuse of the stories and risks involved in revealing identities. However, in the end I left the decision up to them. Having witnessed their tremendous growth over the few years, I was certain that they were now mature enough to make that decision. When I finally sent out drafts of the narratives, I asked each participant to inform me whether I should keep the pseudonyms or change them to their real names. Sawako, Rui, and Kikuko decided to use their full names. Kenji opted for using his real first name but attaching a fictitious last name to it, because he did not want to implicate his family.

There are of course situations in which the assurance of confidentiality is absolute necessity. This includes cases where research materials touch on sensitive issues that could potentially be misused to dishonour the participant, and where the participant's story portrays the person(s) in the position of power over her or him in a negative light. However, if circumstances allow it, using the participants' real names makes sense on several counts.

First, our name is an integral part of our identity. We develop a strong attachment to it over the course of always being identified by it in every stage

of our development. When I worked in an English language school in Japan, I was told by its administrators to pick an Anglo-Saxon name--Katherine, Jane or whatever--as part of the school's effort to recreate a "total English environment" in the classroom. Apart from the inanity of the practice, I could not bring myself to refer to myself by another name, simply because I am Yasuko Kanno and not Katherine Smith. In a similar way, when I showed a draft of Kenji's story to him in which his character appeared under a pseudonym, he voiced a strong objection. "Let me be frank," he said. "I feel a tremendous amount of resistance to my story being told under a name other than my own. In particular, I have a strong aversion--though I don't know why--to someone else fiddling with my name 'Kenji' that was given to me by my parents. It doesn't feel like me."

Second, ensuring the participants' anonymity is not simply a matter of changing their own names: Depending on how tightly their identities have to be hidden, the names of institutions, locations, and years must also be altered. Sometimes a whole story must be embedded in a totally different context so that the participants would not be located. This often poses a dilemma to narrative researchers whose main purpose is to provide richly contextualized stories. Details of a particular context contribute to the shaping of an experience. Altering these details for the sake of confidentiality inevitably lessens the authenticity of a story. Disclosing the identities of the participants, it the situation permits it, allows the researcher to tell the stories in their authentic contexts.

Third--and this is the most important rationale for me--when participants are named, they can share with the researcher the credit for the knowledge that was generated through the collaborative effort. Qualifying

that some situations necessitate the hiding of the participants' identities, Mishler (1986) argues:

> In other situations the assurance of confidentiality does not appear to be in the interests of informants because it parallels and reinforces the decontextualizing effects of the standard interview and the asymmetry of power between interviewee and interviewer. . . . They will not be held personally responsible for what they say, *nor will they be credited as individuals for what they say and think. In brief, they are deprived of their own voices.* (p. 125, emphasis added)

Studies such as this are possible only when there are participants willing to share their experienced knowledge. In this sense, their input is more critical than that of supervisors and colleagues. And yet, the standard research practice is to acknowledge the contribution of professors and colleagues while keeping the identities of the real key players hidden. Such practice reinforces the notion that only certain kinds of knowledge are worth recognizing. It seems rather contradictory to claim that one's research is collaborative in nature and yet to keep one's participants anonymous in the end.

CONCLUSION

The discussion of collaborative relationship in qualitative research tends to focus on the benefits of such research for the participants. The collaborative mode of research, the argument goes, gives voice to those who have traditionally been silenced and helps them grow. In this paper I have argued that learning must be reciprocal; that is, if the researcher wants to make a difference to the participants, she or he must be prepared to be changed in return. In narrative inquiry in particular, the quality of the stories obtained depends heavily on the researcher's commitment to and personal

involvement with the participants. Close collaboration that develops intimacy and intensity over time provides a rare opportunity for the researcher as well as for the participants to observe one's own self in relation to others. What we discover this way is often surprising and is not always agreeable. But it certainly leads us to think of how to connect with others better and to strive for "more vibrant ways of being in the world" (Greene, 1995, p. 5).

Research does not have to be exploitative; it can be made useful to participants. It provides a listening ear and renders support for participants who may be going through a difficult period in their lives. It forces them to articulate otherwise tacit world views and beliefs, thereby leading them to a better self-knowledge. But the equivalent self-revelation and self-reflection take place in the researcher too. Dialogue that is authentic enough to make a significant impact on the participant cannot help transforming the researcher as well.

Knowledge that resulted from such a collaborative relationship belongs to both participant and researcher. When the situation permits, revealing the identities of the participants can be an effective way of acknowledging their contribution. Narrative inquiry draws heavily on the particulars of personal stories; the participants may object to their stories being told under pseudonyms. Hiding identity, while necessary in some cases, also takes away the credit that is due to the participants. Although the researcher can always personally thank the participants, the latter may demand--quite legitimately--more public recognition for their contribution.

The famous last word goes to Rui, who summed up the nature of our collaboration much better than I could have said: "I had thought that 'academic writing' was something more rigid and boring, but was surprised to

find [the draft] as easy to read and as familiar as a novel. It included your subjective comments and the comparison between yourself and the participants. I can see that you are not giving an objective account of us four participants from a detached place but rather you are also telling a story of your own identity, too. I thought that there were not four participants in this project, but actually five. I don't yet know exactly what 'research' is, but as I write this text, the ideal research is one that attain an understanding of the subject but at the same time one in which the researcher gets to know her/himself."

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